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INFO RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3809
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7750
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 4326
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 5488
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 1906
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 2715
RUUAHYAF/5AF YOKOTA AB JA
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 6492
RUHBABA/CG III MEF CAMP COURTNEY JA
RUHBANB/CG MCB CAMP BUTLER JA
RUHBABA/CG THIRD MARDIV CAMP COURTNEY JA
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 003087

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SECDEF FOR OSD/APSA SHINN/SEDNEY/HILL/BASALLA; COMUSJAPAN
FOR J00/J01/J4/J5

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR MARR JA

SUBJECT: NEW DEFENSE MINISTER FACES TOUGH ROAD AHEAD

REF: TOKYO 3037

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Japan's new Defense Minister, Yuriko Koike, will face an uphill battle to establish her policy and managerial credentials. Koike acknowledges that she was chosen primarily to help boost the ruling party's prospects in the July 29 Upper House election and, as such, will be subjected to particularly harsh scrutiny. Security specialists in the government and ruling party expect Koike to make alliance issues her top priority. At the same time, however, many doubt her knowledge of security affairs and ability to lead Japan's sprawling defense establishment. Koike has gotten off to a good start with the media, effectively articulating priorities for the coming months. While Koike had previously advocated "flexibility" on realignment initiatives in Okinawa, she immediately ruled out any revisions to the bilateral-agreed upon roadmap in her early press interviews. Ministry of Defense (MOD) insiders say that Koike is under intense political pressure to stay on message when it comes to realignment. End Summary.

Under a Microscope

¶2. (C) Newly appointed Defense Minister Koike is already facing intense media scrutiny. Koike told the embassy on

July 4 that the main reason for her selection was to boost the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) prospects in the July 29 Upper House election. Politically damaging statements by her predecessor on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki dealt a serious setback to the LDP campaign (Reftel). Given the circumstances of her appointment, Koike commented, the press will be watching her every word and action looking for slip-ups.

America First

¶3. (C) In her initial press comments, Koike placed alliance issues firmly at the center of her agenda. In an interview with NHK, Koike listed as her top three priorities: 1) implementing base realignment; 2) Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) cooperation; and 3) enhancing information security.

¶4. (C) Koike's clear statement on the government's intent to implement the relocation of the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) without changes was significant given her past advocacy of "flexibility" on Okinawan requests to revise the plan. MOD Budget Director Daikichi Monma said that former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Koike's political mentor, personally called Koike on July 3 to tell her that she was not to indulge her own opinions on FRF implementation "like (predecessor Fumio) Kyuma did." Long-time Koizumi confidante Isao Iijima also assured the embassy that Koike would stay on message regarding the FRF. Okinawan Vice Governor Zenki Nakazato told Consulate Naha that Koike's image as an Okinawan sympathizer will allow her to take a hard line on

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the FRF without risking a local backlash.

A Lightweight?

¶5. (C) LDP Defense Division Director and Diet member Katsuyuki Kawai said that the U.S. should be reassured by Koike's appointment given her instinctive pro-American style. Nevertheless, Kawai expressed concern over Koike's grasp of the issues and her ability to control the conservative, male-dominated Self-Defense Forces (SDF). MOFA Security Policy Senior Coordinator Keiichiro Ono said that his MOD counterparts are clearly worried that MOD's voice on policy will be weakened now that it is being led by a "lightweight" Minister. Observers are split over how long Koike will serve as Defense Minister. Abe has not moved to fill her vacated advisory position, leading to speculation that she may go back to her old job after the next cabinet reshuffle. MOFA Administrative Vice Minister Shotaro Yachi predicted, however, that she would continue into the next cabinet. The LDP's Kawai assessed that Koike would last at least until the National Security Council (NSC) law she coordinated was enacted by the Diet in the fall.

Bureaucratic Dynamics

¶6. (C) Observers tell the embassy that MOD Administrative Vice Minister (AVM) Takemasa Moriya's position will be boosted by the Koike appointment. The two reportedly have a good personal dynamic. In addition, Koike owes her success in politics to former PM Koizumi, one of Moriya's key political patrons. The appointment of Koike is expected to enhance Moriya's prospects for extending his term as AVM. Moriya's extension had been in jeopardy given his strained relationship with former Minister Kyuma.

¶7. (C) Koike's new post may complicate MOD's relationship with the PM's office, however, given the well-known rivalry between Koike and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki over control of intelligence policy and U.S.-Japan relations.

MOD Budget Director Monma also expressed personal concerns about Koike's selection. Monma confided that he had clashed

directly with Koike during her tenure as Okinawa Development Minister over how to fund realignment initiatives.

Comment

¶8. (C) Koike is unlikely to make the sort of verbal gaffes that led to the sacking of her predecessor. She is an articulate public speaker, and has a good track record of staying on message even when she disagrees personally with the policy she is defending. Nevertheless, concerns over her ability as a policy manager are legitimate. The embassy has interacted with Koike regularly on security and bilateral issues. While capable of explaining basic Abe administration policy platforms, she will still need to bone up on defense issue details in order to explain the nuances involved in

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matters such as collective self-defense. Koike will also face an uphill battle to gain the respect of the MOD bureaucracy and SDF leadership because right now they view her as simply a quick fix for the Abe government's election woes.

SCHIEFFER